

PHIN CoPs Resource Kit

Evaluate

Evaluate

Mention “evaluation” to most people and reactions range from puzzlement to outright fear and disdain. However, once you gain an understanding of the basics of evaluation and how to use it, you will realize that it is a valuable tool that can provide you with critical information about your CoP.

For excellent sources of information on evaluation, check out these sites:

- [CDC Evaluation Working Group](#)
- [W.K. Kellogg Foundation](#)
- [University of Wisconsin – Program Development and Evaluation](#)
- [Western Michigan University – The Evaluation Center](#)

Evaluation is an integral part of the PHIN Communities of Practice Program. It is important to begin thinking about evaluation as you launch your CoP, for it will guide activities and focus throughout the life of a CoP. Evaluation enables members to think through various options, plan direction, and define processes and outcomes. This Resource Kit provides a basic review of evaluation, explains how evaluation will be conducted within the PHIN CoPs, and provides templates to get you started.

What is Evaluation and Why is it Important?

Effective program evaluation is a systematic way to improve and account for activities conducted by the PHIN CoPs. Evaluation is used widely in many public health settings, and it can be applied easily to communities of practice. As concerns regarding the cost and effectiveness of public health informatics activities continue to grow, evaluation can be a powerful tool to inform decision-making and build support for continued funding.

Evaluation is a critical component of the PHIN Community and PHIN CoPs. As part of the participatory process of CoPs, all PHIN members are active players in both levels of the evaluation, which are described below.

Why Should We Evaluate?

- Find out “what works” and “what does not work”
- Conduct self-assessment and inform decision-making
- Improve partners’ capacity to conduct effective public health practice
- Showcase the effectiveness of each CoP to the PHIN Community
- Further the practice of public health informatics

Evaluation Level 1: PHIN Community Evaluation

CDC will conduct ongoing evaluations of the PHIN Community and the relationship to PHIN CoPs. This will help in determining how well the CoP approach is working, as well as the overall impact on PHIN. Since the use of CoPs is a new approach to improve the implementation of PHIN, information collected through evaluation will assist CDC in assessing how well the PHIN CoPs accomplish their goals.

Evaluation Level 2: CoP Evaluations

CDC developed a core set of questions to gather consistent information across all PHIN CoPs. The [“Core Evaluation Template”](#) contains the core questions that will inform this evaluation. In addition to the core questions, members of each CoP are expected to develop their own questions that address issues specific to their CoP. Staff at CDC are available to assist with this process.

How Do I Participate in the PHIN CoP Evaluation?

There are three ways you can participate in evaluation activities

1. Complete the CDC PHIN CoP evaluation at the annual PHIN conference and any mid-year meetings that may be scheduled;
2. Take an active role in developing the evaluation of your PHIN CoP; and,
3. Participate in additional activities, such as focus groups, to gather information related to a specific evaluation question.

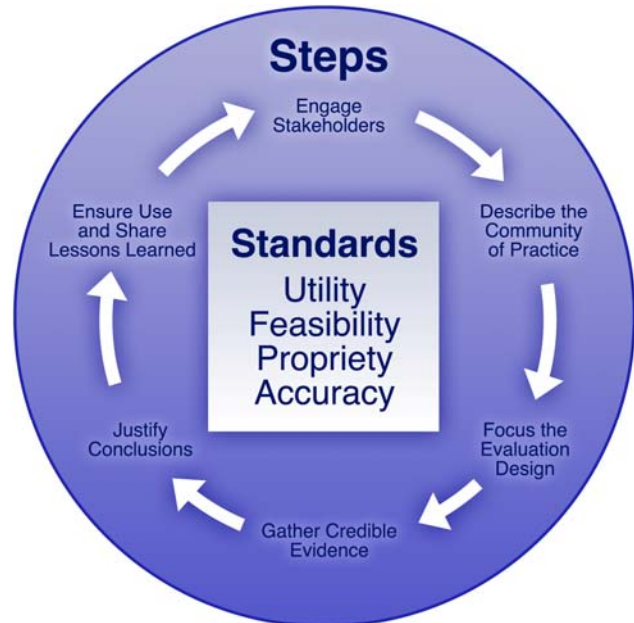
How Do I Get my CoP Evaluation Started?

CDC's Evaluation Framework illustrated in the graphic, is a concise, thorough approach that can be easily understood and applied. The framework, which has been adapted for use with PHIN, emphasizes six logical steps and can be used as a starting point for PHIN CoPs evaluation.

Each of the six steps is described in detail below.

1. Engage Stakeholders

The evaluation cycle begins by engaging stakeholders (i.e., the persons or organizations having an investment in what will be learned from an evaluation and what will be done with the knowledge). Public health work, including PHIN CoPs, involves partnerships; therefore, any assessment of a public health program requires considering the value systems of the partners. Stakeholders should be engaged in a way that ensures their perspectives can be voiced and understood. When stakeholders are not engaged in this way, evaluation findings might be ignored, criticized, or resisted because they do not address the stakeholders' questions or values. After becoming involved, stakeholders help to execute the remaining steps.



Source: <http://www.cdc.gov/eval/whatsnew.htm>

2. Describe the Community

Community descriptions convey the mission and objectives of the CoP being evaluated. Descriptions should be sufficiently detailed to ensure understanding of the CoP's goals and strategies. The description should discuss the CoP's capacity to effect change, its stage of development, and how it fits into the larger PHIN Community. CoP descriptions set the frame of reference for all subsequent decisions in an evaluation. The description enables comparisons with similar CoPs and facilitates attempts to connect community components to their effects. Moreover, stakeholders may have differing ideas regarding CoP goals and purpose. Evaluations done without agreement on the community definition are likely to be of limited use. Sometimes, negotiating with stakeholders to formulate a clear and logical description will bring benefits before data are available to evaluate CoP effectiveness.

3. Focus the Evaluation Design

The direction and process of the evaluation must be focused to assess the issues of greatest concern to stakeholders, while using time and resources as efficiently as possible. Not all design options are equally well-suited to meeting the information needs of stakeholders. After data collection begins, changing procedures might be difficult or impossible, even if better methods become obvious. A thorough plan anticipates intended uses and creates an evaluation strategy with the greatest chance of being useful, feasible, ethical, and accurate.

4. Gather Credible Evidence

Persons involved in an evaluation should strive to collect information that will convey a well-rounded picture of the CoP and be seen as credible by the evaluation's intended audience. Information (i.e., evidence) should be perceived by stakeholders as believable and relevant for answering their questions. Such decisions depend on the evaluation questions being posed and the motives for asking them. Credible evidence strengthens evaluation conclusions and the recommendations that follow.

Assess the Quality of your Evaluation Activities

- **Utility:** Does the evaluation serve the information needs of intended users?
- **Feasibility:** Is the evaluation realistic, prudent, diplomatic, and frugal?
- **Propriety:** Has the evaluation been conducted legally, ethically, and with due regard for the welfare of those involved in the evaluation, as well as those affected by its results?
- **Accuracy:** Will the evaluation reveal and convey technically adequate information about the features that determine worth or merit of the CoP being evaluated?

5. Justify Conclusions

Evaluation conclusions are justified when linked to the evidence gathered and judged against agreed-upon values or standards set by the stakeholders. Stakeholders must agree that conclusions are justified before they will use the evaluation results with confidence.

6. Ensure Use and Share Lessons Learned

Lessons learned during the evaluation should automatically translate into informed decision-making and appropriate action. To make sure the evaluation findings are used correctly, deliberate effort is needed to ensure the evaluation processes and findings are disseminated and interpreted appropriately. Preparing for use involves strategic thinking and continued vigilance of the changing environment, both of which begin in the earliest stages of stakeholder engagement and continue throughout the evaluation.

Moving Along with the Evaluation

Once you understand the basic concepts of evaluation, there are several additional activities that can be completed to target the evaluation to the needs of your Community.

1. First, assess the state of the field that your CoP addresses. A SWOT analysis (defined below) can help you define what currently exists, what is needed, and where the CoP can target its activities.
2. Utilize the information collected in the assessment to develop the goals and SMART objectives (defined below) of your CoP. Specific questions related to the work conducted within the CoP can then be added to the core evaluation template.
3. Finally, the ideas, products, and innovations that are generated by your CoP can be monitored by the ["Innovation Tracking Tool"](#) as they are disseminated within the PHIN community and beyond.

SWOT Analysis

SWOT Analysis is a method used to evaluate the **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats that exist in the area in which the CoP functions. In this context, it is used to assess the environment in which the CoP functions as well as resources and needs that add to the picture. SWOT analysis uses both internal and external factors that may impact the CoP. Internal factors, including strengths and weaknesses, reside within the CoP and its members, while external factors, opportunities and threats, are external to the CoP. Once these critical factors are identified, they are used to create the goals that members of your CoP would like to achieve.

The ["SWOT Analysis Template"](#) can guide you through the steps needed to identify internal and external factors that may influence your decision-making. In addition, the PHIN CoP Program will provide support to CoPs when completing the SWOT analysis.

SWOT Analysis

- **Strengths:** *internal* attributes of the CoP's targeted area that currently exist that can facilitate activities
- **Weaknesses:** *internal* areas that need to be addressed in the targeted area
- **Opportunities:** *external* conditions that may facilitate activities of the CoP
- **Threats:** *external* conditions that may stand in the way of CoP activities

SMART Objectives

Once you have created the goals of your CoP, it is time to think about objectives and activities needed to accomplish these goals. First, ask yourself the following questions:

- **WHAT** are we going to do?
- **WHY** is it important for us to accomplish this activity?
- **WHO** is going to be responsible for the activities?
- **WHEN** do we want this to be completed?
- **HOW** are we going to do these activities?

Once you have answered the questions listed above, define your SMART objectives to move those ideas into action. SMART objectives are:

- **Specific:** Concrete, detailed, and well defined so that you know where you are going and what to expect when you arrive;
- **Measurable:** Numbers and quantities provide means of measurement and comparison;
- **Achievable:** feasible and easy to put into action;
- **Realistic:** Considers constraints such as resources, personnel, cost, and time frame; and,
- **Time-Bound:** A time frame helps to set boundaries around the objective.

The following table lists questions for each SMART objective that will help your CoP translate objectives into SMART ones.

Specific	Measurable	Achievable	Realistic	Time-Bound
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What exactly are we going to do in this CoP?• What strategies will we use?• Is the objective clear?• Is the objective described with strong action verbs such as conduct, develop, build, plan, or execute?• Who will be involved?• What needs to make it happen?• Is the outcome specified?• Will this objective lead to the desired results?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How will we know that change has occurred?• Are we able to gather these measurements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can it be done in the proposed timeframe?• Are the limitations and constraints understood?• Can we do this objective with the resources available to the CoP?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do we have the resources available to achieve this objective?• Is it possible to achieve this objective?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• When will this objective be accomplished?• What is the stated deadline?

The [“SMART Objectives Template”](#) can guide you through the steps needed to define goals and SMART objectives.

Core Evaluation

As a component of the evaluation of PHIN CoPs, a core set of evaluation questions will be gathered across all communities. These core questions cannot be changed unless the change is applied to the evaluation of all CoPs. The core questions will allow CDC to assess how each CoP is evolving, compare characteristics across different CoPs, and track changes over time. In addition to the core questions, members of each CoP are strongly encouraged to develop a set of evaluation questions that are specific to their community. CDC evaluation staff is available to assist with this process. The [“Core Evaluation](#)

[Template](#)” provides the questions and allows for additional questions that are unique to your CoP is included in the Kit.

Innovation Tracking

The CoP environment should prove to be a fertile one that generates new ideas and products, improves existing ones, and disseminates what is learned to improve the practice of public health informatics. The [“Innovation Tracking Tool”](#) is provided for tracking products, ideas, and innovations as part of the overall CDC evaluation.

CAVEAT: High-quality evaluation requires time and effort from the beginning of the process through the justification and sharing of conclusions. Evaluation of each CoP has been designed to relieve CoP members of burden while maximizing individual input into the process. The evaluation section of this toolkit presents the basic concepts of evaluation and provides tools to participate in the process. Feel free to take a closer look at evaluation and give your input into developing an evaluation for your community.

The following table provides an overview of resources that may help you with preparing and conducting an evaluation. Each Resource described below is located in the [Resources Section](#).

Related Resource	Description	Audience
SWOT Analysis Tool	A SWOT analysis will help you identify internal and external factors in the environment (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) that can help with the development of your CoP's goals and objectives.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
SMART Objectives Template	When it comes time to define the goals and objectives of your CoP, this template will walk you through the process of developing specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-based objectives.	Leaders of new and existing CoPs
Core Evaluation Template	This template helps you start-off your evaluation process by aligning it with the standard evaluation for all PHIN CoPs. The template contains core questions that gather the same information across all PHIN CoPs. Each CoP can then modify the template by adding additional questions that are specific to its goals and objects.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)
Innovation Tracking Tool	Creation and dissemination of new products and ideas are important outcomes of CoP collaborations. This template provides a means to record and track innovations that come from PHIN CoPs.	Leaders of new and existing PHIN Communities of Practice (CoPs)

Access the PHIN CoPs Resource Kit [Resources](#), [Glossary](#), and [References](#) on the web.